

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

*Media Office
Democratic Caucus
John Schorg, Director
Statehouse, Room 157
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204
1-800-382-9842 or 1-317-232-9621
Fax Number: 1-317-232-9792*

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STATE REP. TRENT VAN HAAFTEN'S STATEHOUSE REPORT

MT. VERNON – The legislative session has been over for three months, so I have had the luxury of being at home and working in Mt. Vernon. (That's right...unlike Congress, the state Legislature is part-time and when the session is over, I get to come home to the comforts of southwest Indiana.)

Although a citizen Legislature is considered part-time, the work is full-time. I have been active in summer study committees, addressing constituent concerns, and now, preparing for the unexpected surprise that the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) wants to close the Mt. Vernon license branch.

The BMV has been busy this summer closing license branches across the state. Two days after the 2005 legislative session ended, new BMV Commissioner Joel Silverman announced plans to shut down 12 branches. After public hearings were held, nine of those 12 branches were closed.

A new list then was released that targeted 24 branches for closure. Unfortunately, Mt. Vernon is on the list of 24.

Indiana law requires that a public hearing take place before the final decision of closure is made. The public hearing for the Mt. Vernon license branch is August 10, beginning at 7 p.m. Since I had heard that at least one of the previous public hearings took place in a parking lot, I was pleased when the BMV took me up on my offer to secure a location for the hearing. Our public hearing will take place in Wesley Hall of First United Methodist Church, 601 Main Street, Mt. Vernon.

The commissioner has stated his goal in closing branches is to make the BMV more efficient, which "will mean better service for Hoosiers." It is claimed closing branches will cut \$7 million. However, this is not a savings, just a shift in where the money is spent. The money used to operate the closed branches will simply be spent at other branches. If the Mt. Vernon branch is closed, our money will simply be moved elsewhere, while we will have to travel "elsewhere" for the service of a license branch.

In terms of activity, BMV data shows the Mt. Vernon branch handled 29,531 transactions in 2004. According to the BMV, 59.6% of these transactions actually required a visit to the license branch. There has been no listing provided as to the transactions that do not require a branch visit. The BMV further estimates the maximum distance that we would have to travel to the nearest branch is just over 17 miles.

Over a month ago, I asked the BMV to provide data that shows how Mt. Vernon compares with every other branch in Indiana. They have not felt compelled to respond to my request yet.

I have talked to many legislators across the state who have attended public hearings conducted by the BMV on this issue. The commissioner and several of his assistants attend and listen to public testimony. There has been very little presentation from the BMV, since the emphasis is supposedly on listening to the concerns of the public.

However, some of these hearings have been heated and many citizens have complained about the way they have been treated by the BMV. At one particular hearing, the commissioner actually got up and left in the middle of a question and answer period!

What does this mean for those interested in the Mt. Vernon license branch? It means that you have the chance to voice your opinions to your government leaders. Democracy is about being heard and there is no better opportunity than a public hearing.

I want to encourage everyone to attend the public hearing on August 10. We may be a long way from Indianapolis, but we need to show them that we are very much a part of Indiana. I would guess the BMV Commissioner and his assistants have never stepped foot in Mt. Vernon, let alone Posey County. I look forward to joining you August 10 at 7 p.m. in Wesley Hall.

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This news release can be accessed on the Internet at www.IN.gov/H76